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RELATIONSHIP OF THE AMISH TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN OHIO.
FINAL REPORT.

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A DOCTORAL STUDY WAS MADE IN AN ATTEMPT TO (1) DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF THE THREAT POSED TO THE OHIO AMISH BY THE PROGRAM OF STATE CONTROLLED PUBLIC SCHOOLING, (2) REVIEW THE PRINCIPLE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OPEN CONFLICT BETWEEN THE AMISH AND THE SCHOOL AUTHORITIES, AND (3) ANALYZE THE AMISH RESPONSE TO PUBLIC SCHOOLING. THE FIRST PHASE OF THE STUDY WAS AN HISTORICAL RESEARCH INTO AMISH CONFLICT WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLING, AND THE SECOND PHASE INVOLVED DATA COLLECTION THROUGH A 60-ITEM INTERVIEW SCHEDULE. THE ROOT OF AMISH RESISTANCE TO PUBLIC SCHOOLING IS THEIR BELIEF THAT AS A COMMUNITY OF CHRISTIANS, THEY SHOULD MAINTAIN A BOUNDARY BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE SECULAR WORLD. THEY FEAR THAT PUBLIC SCHOOLING WILL DISSOLVE THIS BOUNDARY AND ULTIMATELY DESTROY THE AMISH COMMUNITY. AS A RESULT OF PRESSURE, THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED THEIR OWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS USING UNCERTIFIED AMISH TEACHERS. THE AMISH VIEW PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN "BOOK LEARNING," AND THEIR SCHOOLS TEACH ONLY THE BASIC SKILLS THROUGH THE EIGHTH GRADE. THE AUTHOR CONCLUDES THAT SINCE DIVERSITY OF EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND METHODS IS AN ESSENTIAL FACET OF CULTURAL PLURALISM, AND IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE DISRUPTIVE DISINTEGRATION OF THE AMISH VALUE SYSTEM, THE AMISH SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO REAR THEIR CHILDREN IN CONFORMITY WITH THEIR TRADITIONAL PATTERN OF LIFE. (SF)

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Frederick S. Buchanan

August 1967

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The writer has interviewed the public school superintendents of three Ohio counties and numerous Ohio Amishmen; their frank expressions have added immeasurably to an understanding of the Ohio Amish and their relationship to public education. A special debt of gratitude is due the forty residents of an Ohio Amish settlement who gave freely of their time and opinions and who so warmly welcomed the writer, his wife, and son during a two-week sojourn in the community.

INTRODUCTION

At the present time in the United States being a dropout is considered a liability, and gaining a high school diploma is considered a prerequisite for social and economic success. Not all citizens, however, share these values. Among those who reject them are members of the Old Order Amish--a group of Anabaptists who follow a program of planned "dropouts" for their offspring and who believe that the dangers to their faith of gaining a high school diploma far outweigh any material benefits which it might bestow.

There are presently more Amish in Ohio (18,419) than in any other state. For many years they accepted public elementary schools as long as they were rural in nature and did not depart too radically from Amish life patterns in their curriculum offerings. Since 1914, their resistance to compulsory education requirements, school consolidation, and minimum school standards has sparked dozens of emotional and legal confrontations with local and state school authorities.

In the 1950's, the public school curriculum became increasingly more science oriented; and the program of school consolidation continued to decrease the number of one-room public schools which the Amish attended. The launching of the United States space race with the Soviet Union coincided closely with the launching of a massive Amish drive to remove their children from the worldly influences of the public schools.

This they believed could best be done through the establishment of private Amish elementary schools. The Amish fear the public schools; they do not believe that their simple way of living needs "higher education" (which they define as formal schooling beyond the eighth grade); they believe that maintenance of an Amish parochial school system will help preserve their unique culture and faith.

In this study an attempt will be made to (1) describe briefly the nature of the threat posed to the Amish by the increased state regulation of schools and educational programs in Ohio, (2) review the principal factors contributing to the open conflict between the Amish and the school authorities, and (3) analyze one Amish school district in Ohio to determine its educational values and describe the reasons given by the Amish for developing and establishing "Edgewood"[1] Amish School.

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[1]"Edgewood" is the fictitious name of the Ohio Amish settlement.

METHODS

The first phase of this study consisted of historical research into the Amish conflict with public schooling and was based primarily upon documentary evidence found in Amish and Mennonite publications, testimonies given at hearings held by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission's investigating committee on Amish schools, correspondence between local and state school authorities, newspaper accounts, court records, and personal interviews and correspondence with public school authorities and Amish leaders and laymen.

The second phase centered attention upon one Amish settlement and attempted to assess Amish views on public schools, Amish schools, relevant curriculum, the role of the Amish school in the community, the problems of teacher preparation, and the impact of industrialism. Pertinent data was collected through use of a sixty-item interview schedule in personal interviews conducted during a two-week sojourn in the Edgewood Amish settlement. In addition to the formal responses obtained by means of the interviews, the investigator had many opportunities of making informal observations while visiting with the twenty-five Amish families in Edgewood.

FINDINGS

Like their persecuted forefathers in Europe, the Ohio Amish believe that when the laws of God and the laws of man conflict, they have no choice but to obey the laws of God. For them at least, the education of their children according to their religious beliefs in personal humility, deference to God's will, and simplicity of life means continuation of their traditional pattern of life. Elementary education based on secular rather than on religious standards was, in time, recognized as a threat to the very traits which the Amish depend on to set themselves apart from the world. While public schools were rural, locally controlled, and firmly wedded to a general Protestant ethic, the Amish in general seemed quite content to allow their children to attend these schools. Amish awareness of the threat which the new schools posed grew as compulsory education became universal, as consolidation and centralization triumphed over one-room schools, and as the "old-fashioned" religious morality was gradually crowded out by a secular morality based not on the Bible, but on nonreligious philosophies of education.

At the root of Amish resistance to public schooling is their belief that as a community of Christians, they should maintain a boundary between themselves and the secular world. They fear that public schooling will disoolve the boundary and ultimately destroy the

Amish community. In retrospect they have come to view the gradual development of Ohio's school laws as part of an onslaught on their religious values. Progressively, these laws increased the state's compulsory education requirements and encouraged and required consolidation of school districts and schools. The regulation of all schools through the adoption of minimum standards in 1957 was, for them, the capstone on a system of secular seduction which they believed threatened their right to rear their children to be faithful Amish men and women.

It took many years for Amish opposition to the principle of public schooling to crystallize, however; and in some instances they stretched the boundaries of their religious beliefs and accepted certain aspects of public school requirements. For example, although the Amish were reluctant to accept schooling beyond four or five grades at first, in time they accepted schooling through the eighth grade and have now almost sanctified this educational level as necessary for all Amish children. There is some evidence to indicate that in areas of Ohio where the Amish were few in number the children often completed nine grades, and a few even completed the eleventh grade.

Increased pressures on local districts to consolidate meant the decline of one-room schools which many Amish had come to accept. The more centralized public education became, the more unwilling the Amish were to accept it--principally because such schools removed the child from the influences of the home community and increased his exposure to the teachings of the secular world. Minimum standards legislation, which in part was meant to upgrade Ohio's elementary education by

eliminating the one-room country schools, not only reinforced Amish fears of the adverse effects which public school might have upon Amish children, but also threatened the existence of their own "substandard" private schools by requiring certain kinds of curriculum offerings and state certification of teachers.

While the controversy with the Amish in Ohio has taken different forms as far as the details are concerned, a common strand runs through each confrontation. All of the disputes involved sincere Amish men and women who refused on religious grounds to obey state laws concerning their children's attendance at an "acceptable" school for the mandated number of years. They also involved sincere public school officials who felt obligated on legal grounds to enforce the school laws which the Amish refused to obey. In addition, some seem to have been motivated by a genuine concern for the future well-being of the Amish children in terms of vocational opportunities. These were the principal themes in the disputes, but there were contributing factors which should be considered in order to gain perspective on the "Amish problem" as it is sometimes called. Each major confrontation seems to have been characterized by some of the following conditions:

1. The existence of nonlegal verbal agreements (regarding how much schooling the Amish should have) between the Amish and some local schoolmen tended to evade rather than resolve the issues and served to widen the gap between the schoolmen and the Amish when the public authorities later ignored the agreements and attempted to enforce the letter of the law.

2. The turnover in school personnel at both local and state levels of government increased the difficulty of communicating effectively with the Amish and tended to compound the suspicions of both sides.

3. Local pressures upon school authorities to enforce school laws indiscriminately because of political, economic, or personal considerations were viewed by the Amish as attempts not simply to educate their children, but to destroy their Amish pattern of life. The Amish refusal to support bond issues at the polls, their use of children as farm hands, and their "clannishness" stimulated some of the opposition among the non-Amish and contributed to the demands that the Amish conform to the social norms in regard to schooling.

4. Involvement of the state in the affairs of local school districts increased the pressure upon the local schoolmen to enforce the school laws, especially when this pressure took the form of a threatened withdrawal of state financial support to secondary schools because of a lack of secondary students.

5. The lack of clear-cut guidelines for the formulation and implementation of state educational standards left the local school authorities with the task of enforcing school statutes by prosecuting individual parents for contravention of the compulsory education laws. They were also handicapped by a lack of discretionary authority to adapt state regulations to local requirements and conditions.

6. A general lack of sensitivity on the part of school authorities to the Amish religion and pattern of life did little to promote understanding between the two cultures. The secular orientation of many

educators is a barrier to their understanding of the Amish relationship to the world, although some are aware of the fact that the Amish fear that they will lose their children if they attend public schools. The schoolmen know this but do not understand the distress which this loss may bring to an Amish parent. For the parent it is not simply a matter of his children becoming "Yankee" or "English"; it is a matter ultimately of whether these children will spend eternity in heaven with their loved ones or in hell as outcasts from not only Amish society, but from the Kingdom of God.

7. Intransigence on the part of the Amish even when no apparent religious principles were involved was an important factor in many of the disputes, especially in areas where extremely orthodox Amish sentiments prevailed. Amish opposition in such areas to very minimal requirements, such as adequate buildings and capable and mature teachers, has contributed in part to the public schoolmen's hostility toward Amish schools in general. The autonomy of the Amish church districts also makes it difficult for any one Amish leader to speak for all Amish men on the subject of schooling or religious practices.

8. Neither side in the dispute could effectively communicate with the other at a time when clear communication was essential for even a temporary resolution of the dispute. Conditions conducive to a dialogue broke down and each side continued its own monologue: the schoolmen insisting that they had an obligation to enforce the school laws--the Amish insisting that such enforcement was an infringement of their right to be Amish and to practice their religion. With each side professing a totally different Weltanschauung and speaking different

ideological languages, neither was able to contribute effectively to conditions which might have been conducive to a dialogue between the two and precluded, thereby, any possibility of their arriving at a mutually acceptable accommodation.

Public school pressure on the Amish did not cause them to capitulate, however, but led to the strengthening of the position of an Amish minority who for many years had advocated Amish parochial schools. The number of these schools in Ohio increased from four in 1950 to over seventy in 1967. The establishment of a parochial school system led in turn to the development of a new occupation among the Amish, that of school teaching. This teaching group (few of whom have completed more than eight grades of formal schooling) has stimulated the establishment of a monthly Amish teachers' journal, The Blackboard Bulletin; an Amish publishing corporation; and the inauguration of national and regional Amish teacher conferences. These innovations are likely to have side effects on Amish life as a whole and may paradoxically lead to further changes in Amish educational and religious values although they were meant initially to preserve these values.

Education and schooling among the Amish have as their principal goal the maintenance of boundaries between the ways of the Amish and the ways of the world. From the cradle to the grave the Amish person is surrounded by continual reminders that he is not (or should not be) part of this present world. Amish life may be viewed as a continuous effort to keep the world out of the community, and the child learns at home and at church as well as at school how he should act and how he should think so that he may remain apart from the non-Amish world.

Some of the concerns and problems faced by the Amish in their experiment with private Amish schools are revealed in the results of the survey of Edgewood Amish settlement. Based on personal interviews and observations of the Edgewood Amish the following statements may be made about their attitudes toward public schools, Amish schools, Amish teachers, and the impact of industrialism on Amish life:

Public schools

1. The Amish object more to the content of the public elementary schools than they do to the principle of public schooling.

2. The Amish draw a clear-cut distinction between elementary and secondary education--the first is necessary for Amish children; the second is not.

3. The Amish fear that if their children attend public elementary schools, especially in the upper grades, they may be lost to the Amish faith.

Amish schools

1. The Amish are seriously committed to the proposition that attendance at an Amish elementary school is an essential part of keeping their children Amish.

2. The Amish will not establish a program of secondary schooling for their children unless they are prevailed upon by public pressure to attend school beyond the eighth grade.

3. The Amish believe that only the most basic and necessary subjects should be taught in the Amish school.

4. The Amish regard practical work on the farm and in the home as necessary in preparing their children for adult life. It is more relevant and efficient for them, they believe, than formal secondary schooling.

5. The Amish are uncertain about the precise role which the Amish school should have in the formal religious education of their children.

6. The Amish school is a potential agent of change in the Amish community.

Amish teacher preparation

1. The Amish are seriously concerned that their teachers be adequate to the task of teaching their children and do not always equate being traditionally orthodox in religion with being a "good" teacher.

2. The Amish believe that their teachers should continually improve their "academic" standing, but most believe that the eighth grade should be the limit of formal teacher preparation. More important to the Amish teachers than specific courses is the interaction they have with other experienced Amish teachers.

Impact of industrialism

1. The Amish are aware of the encroachments which modern industrialism is making on their society; but rather than compromise on basic religious essentials, they will relocate in more rural areas.

2. The Amish believe that a willingness to learn and practical experience are more important to Amish occupational success than years of formal schooling.

3. The Amish believe that even with their eighth grade limit on formal schooling they can readily adapt to the occupational demands of modern industry in the event that they do not follow the farming tradition.

4. The Amish view farming and farm-related tasks as the most appropriate employment for Amish people and as being more consistent with Amish religious values than work in industry.

The Amish are under pressure from the external world to change their way of life; in addition, there are internal pressures from the Amish community which also create stresses and strains. "In the world" as they are, the Amish cannot totally prevent their culture from being influenced by the larger society and by individuals and movements within Amish society. They know intuitively that they are struggling against heavy odds to survive as a distinct culture. In the Amish school they have glimpsed the possibility of arresting the changes and preserving what they believe is most basic to Amish life--their faith in God and their simple way of life. Some object to being viewed only as a unique culture and feel that the inner faith of the Amishman is more important than his occupation and external appearance. They are interrelated, of course; and it is difficult to see how the Amish can survive as Amish without being different in looks as well as in beliefs.

CONCLUSIONS

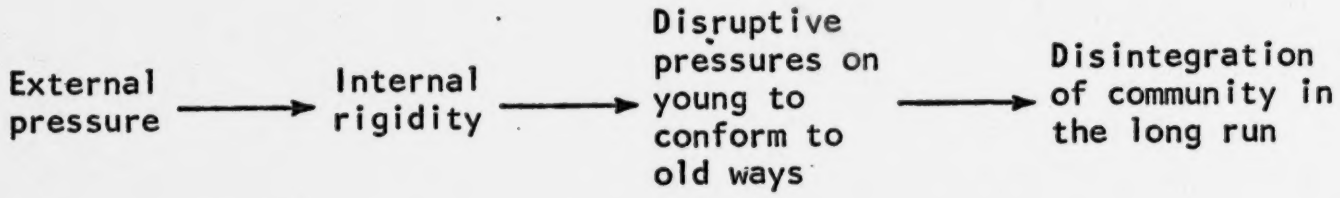
The continual emigration of the Amish to areas where the school laws are less rigid and their establishment of a relatively costly private school system illustrate how the public school has become identified in the Amish mind with the world, which they are under covenant to avoid as much as possible. Indeed, the school problem is seen by some as simply a continuation of the persecution leveled against the Anabaptists from their beginning in the sixteenth century. Then they were willing to uproot themselves from home and country in order to avoid such things as military service and attendance at state churches. Now many of them are willing to do the same in face of increasing industrialization and compulsory public school attendance. The establishment of their own school system may be seen as a kind of migration, too--away from contact with the world--a withdrawal into an environment of their own choice and shaping. Their greatest desire is to perpetuate the ways of their fathers through maintaining family-sized farms and keeping their children close to home in schools of their choice. The effectiveness of their schools in doing this has yet to be demonstrated.

The two problems of industrialization and schooling are closely related and present the Amish with a difficult dilemma. If they live close to a large urban center, the land prices eventually make it impossible for their children to engage in farm work. They may decide

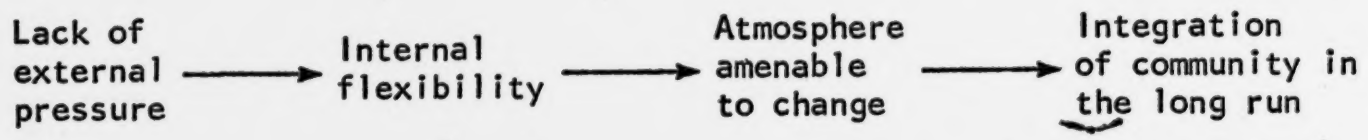
to remain, establish their own school system, and allow their children to work in local factories. They face in the short run, however, increasing contact with the larger society which they wish to avoid; and in the long run their schools may prove inadequate as their youth become more enmeshed in industry and the technical aspects of modern life. In this event they may be forced to upgrade their schools in order to provide a more adequate education in technical skills. Nonfarm work and "higher education" are unacceptable to many Amish, and often the only recourse open is to migrate to an area where rural values and the agrarian life as they know it are still predominant. Failing this, they may in time become members of a progressive group within the framework of Amish values (e.g., Beachy Amish) or attach themselves to a Mennonite group.

The Amish have changed since their founder, Jacob Ammann, broke with the Mennonites in 1693 and attempted to restore the Christian church to its pristine purity; and they continue to change today. They could not have persisted without allowing some modification of practices and beliefs. Modification has come slowly and almost imperceptibly, but it has come. In a former age when general social change was slow, the Amish changed with little discomfort or dislocation--true, they lagged behind the "progressive" element in society, but so did a large proportion of rural America. Since the end of World War II, however, the pace of change has caught up almost every segment of society, including the rural. The Amish may not want to be in the main stream of civilization; but whether they want to or not, civilization is making inroads upon them and is stimulating further change in their pattern of life. In the

long run, unless they can isolate themselves almost completely from general society, as the Hutterites have done, the Amish will be assimilated. The cliché "one thing leads to another" is as true for the Amish as for the rest of society, but there is a vast difference between disintegration of a culture over a short period of time and integration over a longer period. The latter is a result of the normal process of social and economic contact with the general society; the former is often precipitated by the application of pressures from "outside" sources. The process may be diagrammed as follows:


External pressure
Internal rigidity
Disruptive pressures on young to conform to old ways
Disintegration of community in the long run

The threat from the outside actually strengthens the group's old norms--norms which otherwise might have been abandoned. Rather than being acculturated and integrated, the group will revive traditional ways. In contrast, the absence of external pressures may be diagrammed thus:


Lack of external pressure
Internal flexibility
Atmosphere amenable to change
Integration of community in the long run

The Amish are seriously committed to their schools and have apparently accepted the changes which have resulted from the introduction of schools and professional Amish teachers into the Amish community's pattern of living. At one time the schoolhouse was peripheral to the Amish community; today it has become, for many, an important focus of community involvement. For a time the Amish were apathetic about

establishing their own schools and some even resisted the notion; today the schools seem to be accepted as part of Amish values almost as much as beards, buggies, and plain clothes. They have come to accept, however cautiously, the leadership of Amish educators and are now more involved in formal education than they have ever been in their history.

Repeatedly the Amish have said, in effect, "Leave us alone; give us time to work out our school problems." Unless they are allowed to do this, they may become more recalcitrant; and more disintegration will ensue with its accompanying blight on human feelings and relationships. The Amish have roots, they have a sense of community, they know who they are and who their neighbor is. They have no desire to share in the pattern of alienation which is so much a part of modern urban society. By gradually adapting to their environment the Amish may be able to preserve some of their community values; if change is forced upon them, they may be led to destroy, inadvertently, the very community values which make life meaningful to them. Prosecution and overt pressure to conform may intensify Amish rigidity and mitigate against the creation of a permissive social atmosphere which might allow gradual change to take place.

Not only is pressure upon the Amish unlikely to create a climate amenable to change, but such pressure may also be contrary to the basic pluralism of American democracy. The stated intent of some Ohio schoolmen is to acculturate the Amish and consequently destroy the Amish as an ethnic group. This is done in order to preserve the schoolmen's interpretation of the American way of life. Those who insist that the Amish conform are apparently untroubled that their particular

prescriptions, while suitable for some, may not be suitable for all. The insistence that the letter of the law must be maintained--what Robert Merton describes as "bureaucratic overconformity"--leads almost inevitably to a disregard of the human and emotional dimension of the Amish problem and a total disregard of the place which nonconforming minorities have in a pluralistic culture.

The Amish assertion that the public school curriculum is unnecessary and irrelevant to the needs of Amish children is reinforced by the present dropout problem among the non-Amish and the criticisms directed at the public educational systems by Edgar Friedenberg, Paul Goodman, Jules Henry, and others. These critics raise questions about the notion that a standardized program of education has of necessity relevance for <u>all</u> young people. The dropout is a problem to himself and to society precisely because formal schooling is irrelevant to his life and even to the lives of many who do not drop out officially but who have long since lost whatever interest they had in school. They see little relationship between what occurs within the classroom and living in mid-twentieth century America. It is not surprising, therefore, that public schools are frequently held to be irrelevant to the needs of Amish youths whose value orientation is entirely different from that of the general society.

One of the complaints brought against the Amish schools by Ohio's schoolmen is that they lack a written philosophy of education; such a statement must be filed with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in observance of the minimum standards requirements. This complaint underscores the gap which separates the two ways of thinking

and living. The Amishman does not need to write a philosophy of education; he believes it has already been written for him in such statements as: "And be not conformed to this world." (Romans 12:2) Informally, his philosophy of education is written into the everyday life of the Amish community. Amish school buildings, texts, curriculum, teachers, companions, and future employment are all related to the basic Amish belief that they should be apart from the world. From one's own particular vantage point one may criticize their choice of values, but to deny them the right of making it runs counter to the fundamental values of democratic society. The Amish and their schools are not a threat to the welfare of society unless, of course, diversity is.

The Amish should be accepted for what they are. Rather than force them to accept the cultural values of the secular world, they should be encouraged to maintain their distinctive pattern of life. They have been allowed to object on the grounds of religion to service in the armed forces and have been excused by the federal government from the necessity of paying Social Security taxes because of their religious sentiments concerning insurance. In Ohio some counties have constructed an extra berm on their roads to accommodate Amish buggies so that they will not slow down motorized vehicles. Is it too much to ask that the educational highways also be built to accommodate more than one approach to education and schooling?

There is more than one way to be human, to be happy, to be educated--or even to be Amish. Diversity with all the problems it may create is fully compatible with a democratic civilization. It is a prime cultural value which should not only be preserved, but should be positively encouraged in education and in other facets of life.